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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study to determine attitudes among women in the field of social work regarding opportunities for professional advancement. Specifically, the study investigated whether female social workers noticed differences in opportunity among males and females to be recruited to management positions and to hold management positions once they were recruited. The study also compared perceptions of women who desire administrative positions and those who do not. A random sample of 1,000 female members of the National Association of Social Workers received a five-page questionnaire. Among other background statistics which were collected, a breakdown by administrative status and desire for administrative positions became the basis for analyzing responses. Questions covered sexist practices in hiring, personal/professional conflicts, need for aggressiveness, role models, and personal and organizational supports. A major finding was that women who are non-administrators with desire to be, perceive sexist practices at a higher level, see a need to be aggressive to get ahead, undergo more professional conflict, and desire more organizational support for their career goals. The author suggests that training programs be developed for women seeking management positions. These programs should teach women to be competitive, take and give criticism, develop role models, use language and code words, develop networks of contacts, take risks, develop stamina, and never expect praise. (Author/AV)

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TITLE: PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE SOCIAL WORKERS TOWARD ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

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PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE SOCIAL WORKERS
TOWARD ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

There is increased concern with the opportunity for and role of women in administrative positions in social work. From the literature it appears that social work has lagged behind other disciplines in providing opportunities for women to move into administrative positions, and there has been a concomitant lag in documenting and investigating women's attitudes in this area. As opportunities for administration expand for women, new issues and choices are produced. The choices have been summarized by Ann Hyde for the woman in the business world that are applicable to social work. She states that the woman who makes a "personal commitment" to move up in an organizational heirarchy must ask herself four questions: (1) Do you want a career?; (2) What do you want it to be?; (3) How much are you willing to invest; and (4) What will be the arena in which you will make that investment? Hyde believes moving up in management involves risk, being realistic about the answers to the above questions, and that top management is not for everyone because people have to be comfortable with what they do.[1] Rosabeth Kanter has a slightly different perspective holding that women who are moving up have higher aspirations, more self-esteem, and more risk taking ability than women who get "stuck" in lower level positions.[2]

In other words, to move up in the organization women must be more aggressive and assertive. Schein holds that women with more traditional views are more likely to avoid administration[3] and asserts that "women may suppress the exhibition of many managerial job attributes in order to maintain their feminine self image."[4] In support of this view, Miller and Coghill argue that historically in factories the first supervisors were women promoted from front line positions, but as labor unions emerged women withdrew from leadership roles because of the aggressiveness

associated with unions.[5] While women are becoming more active in unions, the old attitudes still prevail and women shy away from union activity. Today less than 5-million of America's 38-million working women are represented by unions.[6]

While perceptions held by women have impact on their movement upward in organizations, research shows that performance and ratings of women are equal to those of men. A study by Moses and Boehm[7] of 4,848 women employed by the Bell System who had been evaluated for promotion in an assessment-center found that women were rated as capable as men. The predictors of successful management (leadership, decision-making, and organization and planning) were highly correlated ($r=.75$, $p=<.01$) for males and females.[8] In a study by Jacobson and Effertz using an experimental design, followers rated the performance of male leaders as being worse than that of female leaders.[9] Bartol and Wortman in a study of 72 supervisors in a large psychiatric hospital found few differences between male and female leaders with respect to perceptions of their leadership behavior and satisfaction with various aspects of their jobs,[10] but the researchers did find a tendency for women to gravitate to positions related to patient care.[11] Munson in a study of 65 social work supervisors found no difference in the ratings of male and female supervisors. In fact female supervisors were rated significantly higher than males on a majority of the variables studied.[12]

In spite of the performance based research showing no difference in men and women managers, there is other research evidence to support the view that women are perceived as having differing capability from men at the point of being recruited[13] for management positions and in holding such positions.[14] At the same time research has found that many women accept these negative typifications and often avoid management positions.[15] The research reported in this paper was in part designed to determine if women in social work perceive such differences

and if perceptions differ for women who desire administrative positions and those who do not.

Methodology

A random sample of 1,000 female members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was selected from the NASW membership roster. Males, students, and retirees were excluded from the sample. A five-page questionnaire was mailed and a follow-up letter was sent one week later to encourage participation. Both mailings explained the study and that it was being sponsored by the Womens' Issues Committee of NASW. Five hundred ninety-two (592) usable questionnaires were returned. This response rate of 59.2% was considered quite high for a mailed survey questionnaire. Since it was not possible to determine how many of the questionnaires were returned because of incorrect or insufficient address, it is quite possible the response rate was much higher for the actual number of questionnaires delivered. Responses were received from all but 10 states.*

The respondents' mean age was 49.4 years. Just over half (52.2%) of the sample was married, 20.1% were divorced, widowed or separated, and 26.7% had never been married. The married women had an average of 1.9 children while the divorced, widowed or separated group had an average of 1.2 children. Forty-six percent (46%) of the sample reported having no children, 37% reported having one or two children, and only 17% have more than two children. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the women were white, 7.4% black, .5% Hispanic, .5% Asian American, .3% American Indian. The remaining 2.3% did not report their race and ethnicity.

The majority (89.5%) held the MSW degree while 3.7% reported holding an MA degree in another field. The doctorate in social work was held by 34% and 2.2% held

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*The states that no responses were received from were Alaska, Arkansas, Hawaii, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshrie, North Dakota, Oregan, South Dakota, and Washington. All of these unrepresented states have low percentiles of total NASW membership.

a doctorate in another field. Only .3% had a BSW degree and only .3% had a BA degree. The mean number of years work experience prior to receiving the masters degree was 4 years, and the average number of years work experience since receiving the masters degree was 14.5 years. An average of 4.9 years was reported for their current position. Income was reported categorically and 36.2% reported income between $20,000 to $40,000 annually, 29.1% were in the $15,000 to $20,000 range, 10.8% were in the $10,000 to $15,000 range, 5.6% reported income below $10,000, and 1% reported income above $40,000. No income or retired status was reported by 17.4%.

Regarding formal academic training in management, 44.8% reported no such training, 32.3% reported having taken management courses in schools of social work unrelated to a degree program, 8.1% had taken courses in non-social work management. Only 5.9% had an MSW degree with a specialization in administration, and 3.2% had a masters or doctorate degree in non-social work management.

The majority of the respondents (64.2%) reported they were in non-administrative positions, and 35.8% reported holding administrative positions. The two-way breakdown by administrative status and desire revealed that 43.7% of the sample were non-administrators with no desire, 20.5% were non-administrators who desire to be, 22.9% were administrators who sought such positions, and 12.9% were administrators who had no desire for such positions. This breakdown by administrative status and desire for administrative positions became the basis of the analysis of the data presented in the tables that follow in this paper.

Findings

Table 1 contains scores for non-administrators and administrators in areas of their views on traditional roles for women and sexist practices in agencies. In the areas of a career producing personal conflict and that the mother/wife role should take priority over a career, both groups tended to disagree with these beliefs and the slight differences in the mean scores were not significant. With respect

TABLE 1. MEAN SCORES ON PERCEPTIONS OF NON-ADMINISTRATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS			
	Non-Administrator (N=353)	Administrator (N=197)	F	p[a]
TRADITIONAL VIEW				
Career Produces Personal Conflict	1.8	1.6	.50	N.S.
Mother/Wife Role a Priority	3.7	3.6	.37	N.S.
Administration Better Suited to Men	1.7	1.6	3.61	.05
SEXIST PRACTICES				
Women's Ideas Less Acceptable	2.4	2.4	.41	N.S.
Women Considered Less Credible	2.9	3.0	.29	N.S.
Men Given Preference in Work Assignments	3.4	3.2	2.30	N.S.
Men Given Preference in Promotions	3.8	3.4	5.90	.02
Hiring Practices Sexist	3.1	2.9	3.20	N.S.
Personnel Practices Sexist	3.0	2.7	4.80	.03
Sexism Less Now	3.2	3.7	7.40	.01

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

to sexist practices the two groups saw no significant differences in women being considered less credible or acceptable in agency roles, in men being given preference in work assignments and hiring practices being sexist. In all of these areas both groups tended to disagree with these perceptions. In the area of men being shown preferences in promotions, personnel practices being sexist, and decrease in sexism overall, non-administrators were more likely to view men as having an advantage at a significantly higher level.

Table 2 contains the breakdowns on the same variables for the two groups according to whether they desire (or sought) administrative positions. On the three variables related to the traditional view of women's roles, the same pattern emerged as in Table 1. Regarding sexist practices a very different pattern emerged. In this area, all seven variables produced significantly different scores. On all seven variables the category of non-administrators who desired to be, perceived sexism as prevalent on a significantly higher level than any of the other three combinations. The second highest scores were attained by administrators who sought that role. The lowest sexism scores were received by the non-administrators and administrators who have no desire for that role. These findings indicate that those who have desire for administrative positions, regardless of whether they presently hold such positions, struggle with perceptions of sexist practices in agencies more than those who have no desire for such positions.

Table 3 reports the perceptions in the areas of need for aggressiveness and perceived personal and professional conflict. Women in administrative roles saw the need to strive to excel, to be competitive and to have their career as a primary focus at a significantly higher level than the non-administrators, but there was no significant difference between the two groups with respect to aggressiveness being important to success. It would appear that these findings do

TABLE 2. MEAN SCORES ON PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS BY ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS AND DESIRE

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS: Non-Administrator With No Desire (N=249)	Non-Administrator With Desire (N=113)	Administrator With Desire (N=126)	Administrator With No Desire (N=71)	F	p[a]
TRADITIONAL VIEW						
Career Produces Personal Conflict	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.9	.43	N.S.
Mother/Wife Role a Priority	3.7	3.6	3.5	3.8	.71	N.S.
Administration Better Suited to Men	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.7	3.24	.02
SEXIST PRACTICES						
Women's Ideas Less Acceptable	2.2	2.8	2.5	2.4	5.11	.004
Women Considered Less Credible	2.7	3.3	3.0	2.9	4.51	.004
Men Given Preference in Work Assignments	3.3	3.8	3.3	3.1	3.42	.02
Men Given Preference in Promotions	3.5	4.4	3.5	3.4	7.79	.001
Hiring Practices Sexist	2.9	3.6	3.0	2.6	6.95	.001
Personnel Practices Sexist	2.8	3.6	2.8	2.6	10.01	.001
Sexism Less Now	3.2	3.2	3.8	3.5	2.86	.04

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

TABLE 3. AGGRESSIVENESS AND ROLE CONFLICT BY ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS Non-Administrator (N=353)	Administrator (N=197)	F	P[a]
NEED FOR AGGRESSIVENESS				
Strive to Excel	4.2	4.5	4.88	.03
Strive to be Competitive	3.9	4.1	3.99	.05
Aggressiveness Important to Success	5.1	5.0	.11	N.S.
Career Primary Focus	3.4	3.7	5.35	.02
PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT				
Successful Personally	4.9	4.9	.20	N.S.
Successful Professionally	4.8	5.2	13.66	.001
Balanced Without Conflict	4.6	4.5	1.81	N.S.
Unbalanced with Conflict	2.0	2.1	.33	N.S.
Children Prevent Overtime	1.9	1.5	9.41	.002

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

indicate that there is a difference in individual perceptions of the need to excel and to be competitive among women who remain in non-administrative positions and those who become administrators.

Both groups saw themselves as successful personally and professionally at a high level, but administrators saw themselves as successful professionally at a significantly higher level than the non-administrators. Also, administrators perceived children as preventing overtime work at a significantly lower level than non-administrators. Neither group perceived much conflict between their personal and professional roles.

Table 4 gives the breakdown on the aggressiveness and conflict scores by administrative status and desire and provides additional elaboration of the perceptions in these areas. All of the need for aggressiveness scores produced significantly different outcomes for the four groups. In the areas of striving to excel, striving to be competitive, and aggressiveness important to success, the highest scores were achieved by the non-administrators with desire group, and the second highest scores occurred in the administrator with desire group. Administrators with desire and non-administrators with desire achieved the highest scores on the variable career as primary focus. In all cases the lowest scores emerged for the non-administrators and administrators with no desire. These findings support the view that desire to be an administrator is more important than the actual position the person holds.

In the area of personal and professional conflict the same pattern emerged in the two-way breakdown of Table 4 as occurred in the one-way breakdown of Table 3. There were no differences in the mean scores for perceptions of personal success and careers being balanced without conflict. While all four groups got relatively high scores on perception of professional success, the scores were

TABLE 4. AGGRESSIVENESS AND ROLE CONFLICT BY ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS AND DESIRE

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS: Non-Administrator With No Desire (N=240)	Non-Administrator With Desire (N=113)	Administrator With Desire (N=126)	Administrator With No Desire (N=71)	F	P[a]
NEED FOR AGGRESSIVENESS						
Strive to Excel	4.0	4.9	4.8	4.0	18.98	.001
Strive to be Competitive	3.6	4.5	4.4	3.6	17.44	.001
Aggressiveness Important to Success	5.0	5.2	5.1	4.9	2.56	.05
Career Primary Focus	3.2	3.5	3.8	3.4	3.42	.02
PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT						
Successful Personally	5.0	4.8	4.9	4.9	.61	N.S.
Successful Professionally	4.3	4.5	5.2	5.1	8.21	.001
Balanced Without Conflict	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.4	1.09	N.S.
Unbalanced with Conflict	2.0	2.2	2.0	2.2	1.50	N.S.
Children Prevent Overtime	1.7	2.2	1.4	1.6	6.27	.001

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

significantly different with the non-administrator with desire group receiving the lowest scores. The same pattern emerged with respect to children preventing overtime. The non-administrator with desire group perceived this as a problem at a higher level than the other three groups.

Tables 5 and 6 report the perceptions of personal supports, organizational supports and role models for career activity. None of the variables in these areas showed significant differences for the non-administrator breakdown in Table 5 except provision for professional growth provided by agencies. Administrators felt there was provision for professional growth at a significantly higher level than non-administrators. In both groups the closest person, family and friends, family supported the participants career activity, and family was not viewed as a barrier to relocation for career reasons. The participants did not perceive their families as believing their place is in the home. Organizational supports for career women were not perceived as being very high. The participants reported little flex time being allowed, low levels of maternity programs, and very little day care services are provided. Both groups agreed that they had female and male supervisors as positive role models and were less likely to view professors as helpful role models.

In Table 6 the two-way breakdown produced only minor significant differences in the pattern. In the area of personal supports the category of friends resulted in significantly different scores with non-administrator with desire group showing the highest support while the administrator with no desire group got the lowest scores. This latter group also showed a slightly higher tendency to perceive their family as believing their place is in the home.

In the area of organizational supports there were significant differences in the scores on provision for professional growth and provision for flex time. As with other variables producing significant differences, the non-administrator with desire felt there was little provision for professional growth and little provision for flex time when compared with the three groups.

TABLE 5. MEAN SCORES ON SUPPORTS BY ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS Non-Administrator (N=353)	Administrator (N=197)	F	p[a]
PERSONAL SUPPORTS				
Closest Person	5.1	5.1	.13	N.S.
Family	2.2	2.2	.03	N.S.
Friends	4.9	4.8	2.10	N.S.
Family Against Relocation	2.5	2.7	.78	N.S.
Family Believes Place in Home	1.7	1.8	.57	N.S.
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS				
Provision for Professional Growth	3.9	4.4	13.94	.001
Flex Time Allowed	2.8	2.7	.81	N.S.
Maternity Program Adequate	3.2	3.5	3.02	N.S.
Day Care Adequate	1.7	1.7	.01	N.S.
ROLE MODELS				
Helpful Professors	3.9	4.0	.28	N.S.
Helpful Female Supervisor	4.8	4.7	.27	N.S.
Helpful Male Supervisor	4.0	4.1	.51	N.S.

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

TABLE 6. MEAN SCORES ON SUPPORTS BY ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS AND DESIRE

Perception	ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS: Non-Administrator With No Desire (N=240)	Non-Administrator With Desire (N=113)	Administrator With Desire (N=126)	Administrator With No Desire (N=71)	F	p[a]
PERSONAL SUPPORTS						
Closest Person	5.1	5.1	5.2	4.9	1.12	N.S.
Family	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.3	1.37	N.S.
Friends	4.9	5.0	4.9	4.5	2.97	.03
Family Against Relocation	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.8	1.54	N.S.
Family Believes Place in Home	1.7	1.8	1.7	2.0	2.85	.04
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORTS						
Provision for Professional Growth	4.0	3.6	4.4	4.4	6.85	.001
Flex Time Allowed	3.0	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.19	.03
Maternity Program Adequate	3.3	3.1	3.6	3.3	1.55	N.S.
Day Care Adequate	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.51	N.S.
ROLE MODELS						
Helpful Professors	3.9	4.0	4.1	3.7	1.68	N.S.
Helpful Female Supervisor	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	.18	N.S.
Helpful Male Supervisor	4.0	4.1	4.2	3.9	.55	N.S.

[a]N.S. = Not Significant

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal some general patterns that should be taken into account as policies and programs are developed to enhance management and administrative opportunities for women. When looking at the findings simply on the basis of whether women are administrators or not, few differences in perception emerge, but when administrative status is further broken down according to desire to be an administrator, a different and consistent pattern did emerge. Women who were non-administrators with desire tended to have more negative perceptions than the other three groups.

Women in this study who were administrators and non-administrators with desire tended to view sexist practices existing in agencies at a higher level. While there is no research available in social work on the specifics of such practices especially by male managers, research from the business world suggests that sexism on the part of male managers is very real.[16] We need more information about such practices in social work, and strategies must be developed for dealing with them. These strategies would be an important component of any training program and should be based on individual as well as group efforts to assist aspiring women managers.

The findings reveal that clearly, women who are non-administrators with desire to be, perceive sexist practices at a higher level, a need to be aggressive to get ahead, undergo more professional conflict, and desire more organization supports for their career goals. While all of these problems do not seem to be as severe for women in social work as for women in business and industry, they do exist at a significantly higher level for this particular group of social work women. It is advocated that training programs be developed to aid these women in achieving their career aspirations. The remainder of this paper deals with suggesting content for such training programs.

While women who do not hold but desire management positions might welcome training programs, research has shown that once women attain management positions they are

reluctant to undergo such training while male managers do not tend to show such resistance.[17] Numerous reasons are given by women for shying away from management training.[18] A training program must take into account these resistances at the point of recruiting participants. Women in management positions can contribute a great deal of knowledge for the non-administrator to use as they seek to move up in the organization as well as learning ways they can assist other women desiring to move up. Some women managers tend to fall into the "queen bee syndrome" in relation to aspiring women managers, and a training program could make female managers sensitive to avoiding this stance. Also, a training program should contain content to help the aspiring manager when she encounters this response in female managers they must or choose to associate with.

Women who desire to move up in management positions have thus far been encouraged to learn and use the same strategies that men have used. The writings of Hennig and Jardim[19] and Newton[20] are based on such strategies. Research by Schein supports this view because she found that both male and female middle managers perceived successful managers as possessing characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments that are more commonly ascribed to men than women. Schein's research led her to conclude: "These and other findings pertaining to women managers suggest that acceptance of stereotypical male characteristics as a basis for success in management may be a necessity for the women seeking to achieve in the current organizational climate."[21] This might be a difficult strategy for women in social work to adopt since they are often sensitive to and knowledgeable about feminist views they would perceive as in opposition to such a strategy. This is only speculation at this point, but a study by Staines et al. found that professional women, more so than women who identified themselves as traditional or strongly feminist, believed that ". . . women have only themselves to blame for not doing better in life."[22] Any training program designed to aid women in becoming managers in social work must be aware of this potential conflict and build in content to deal with adopting such

a strategy. This is especially important because acceptance of the masculine management stereotype is strongest in a woman's early years of a management career,[23] and conflicts related to being a woman and a manager surface at later stages of a management career.[24] If training is to be provided for women who are non-administrators and desire to be, these issues must be addressed and women prepared in advance to deal with them.

If women need to develop male strategies for management roles, then training must devote attention to specific characteristics that must be developed. In general these characteristics have been categorized as: (1) view tasks as a set of responsibilities to be met, (2) view a job as a means of support and a way to earn a living;[25] and (1) be competitive, (2) learn how to take and give criticism, (3) develop role models, (4) learn how to use language and code words, (4) develop networks of contacts, (5) do not expect praise, (6) learn to take risks, and (7) develop stamina.[26] At the same time attention must be given to the possibility that certain feminine characteristics that would highlight a good manager role are not given up as new characteristics are adopted. For example, Schein found that women were perceived to possess "employee-centered" behaviors such as understanding, helpfulness, and intuitiveness more than men.[27] In modified form these managerial characteristics are part of social work training. These characteristics need to be translated into managerial form for female managers along with the other characteristics that have been identified. Both sets of characteristics need not be presented in a dichotomous male/female listing but as a total set of characteristics essential for all managers. This is important since the findings of this study reveal that women have had both male and female supervisors they perceive as having been quite helpful to them as role models.

NOTES

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2. Rosabeth M. Kanter, "How Organization Structures Help People Succeed or Fail," paper presented at a Seminar for Business and Professional Women, sponsored by Women Executives Task Force of The Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce and The Hartford Courant, Hartford, Connecticut, April 1979, pp. 2-3.

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22. Ibid., p. 344.

23. Ibid., p. 344.

24. Hennig and Jardim, pp. 137-154.

25. Ibid., p. 13.

26. Newton, op. cit.

27. Schein, "The Relationship Between Sex Role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics," op. cit., p. 100.